

REMARKS

ON

SEVERAL PASSAGES

IN THE

WORKS

OF THE

Late Rev. JOHN WESLEY:

BEING

A brief Description of what is called

“The Old Plan.”

AND OF

MR. WESLEY'S SENTIMENTS

CONCERNING A

CHRISTIAN CHURCH.



Addressed to the People called METHODISTS.

By a FRIEND to that RELIGIOUS BODY.

Bristol :

PRINTED AND SOLD BY R. EDWARDS,
UNION-STREET.

1795.

[PRICE THREE HALFPENCE]

REMARKS, &c.

SEEING that term, "the Old Plan" is much used at this time ; and that, in a way which reflects censure on those who think some additions to the Methodist economy to be useful and necessary in particular places ; and, as it is certain, many who contend for what they call the "Old Plan" with vehemence, do not understand its meaning, I have taken the liberty, for the clear display of truth, to select from Mr. Wesley's own publications, 1st. An account of the Methodist *Plan*. 2nd. What is meant by the term, *Church* : and 3rd. Mr. Wesley's own declarations concerning a separation from the Church of England, in some cases.

1. In that tract, entitled "A plain account of the people called Methodists, in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Perronet," we read as follows, page 4th. "As they (Mr. Wesley and his assistants) had not the least expectation of any thing like what has since followed, so they had no previous design, or *Plan* at all ; but every thing rose just as the occasion offered. They saw, or felt, some impending or pressing evil, or some good end necessary to be pursued, and many times they fell unawares on the very thing, which secured the good, or removed the evil. At other times they consulted on the most probable means, following, *only common sense, and Scripture.*"

All who read the above passage with attention and impartiality, will see, 1st. that Mr. Wesley publicly disclaimed having ever laid down any *fixed plan*, for the discipline and worship of the Methodists ; and if so, what an imposition upon the credulous is the present clamour about a departure from *the old plan* ? Is it not really a strife concerning who shall be master ? and how shall those masters be served, so that they may al-

ways have the pre-eminence? I would secondly remark here, Mr. Wesley declares his fixed rule, or *plan*, was, upon all occasions to follow "only common sense and scripture." Now as from this *plan* no Christian can depart, so no reasonable man will desire a departure. And is it not agreeable to scripture and common sense, for all who preach the gospel, to administer all the ordinances of the gospel, where the people desire them to do so? Certainly there is no prohibition to their doing this in any part of the New Testament; therefore, this is perfectly agreeable to the *old plan*. We may add, if common sense should direct the *application* of scripture on all occasions, then the common sense of the Preachers assembled in Conference, who now represent Mr. Wesley, and must be allowed to do so, if the Methodists remain as a body, should direct it in this instance, and thus the *old plan* will be strictly adhered to.

But I would make a second remark upon Mr. Wesley's Plan. If common sense and scripture be our standard, it is perfectly agreeable to both, that the majority of any religious community or society, should be at liberty to add to, or alter their mode of worship, as far as these alterations, &c. are agreeable to the scripture, and the primitive pattern; and not that any combination of rich men, suppose ten or twenty in a society, should dictate to one hundred or even a thousand, how they shall worship God. It is the height of spiritual tyranny to require a whole society to give up their judgment and consciences to two or three, or twenty men. But it may be objected, "these two or three persons are Trustees for the chapel, and therefore it belongs to them to regulate the service and prevent innovations." I answer, the term innovation must mean, if it mean any thing, that something is attempted to be introduced which is contrary to the *old plan*. But I have proved that the administration of the Lord's Supper by the Preachers, is not contrary to the old Plan; and if the Trustees read the Conference-Deed, they will there see, that the *manner of worship* is not even mentioned, but only the *doctrines* taught. A second objection is, "that these persons are accountable for the debts on the chapels, and therefore they ought to be permitted

to prevent any thing that would lessen their income." I answer, the union and happiness of the society will increase their income, rather than lessen it; but the division of any society will effectually lessen the income; and what is worse, prevent an addition of new members, and of consequence the success of the ministry. I would not be understood, by my remark upon the right which an individual society has to alter its mode of worship, that this ought to be permitted in the Methodist Connection, without the consent of the Conference.

To confirm what I have said respecting the old Plan, I shall select a few more passages from the Tract I have mentioned, by which you will see, Mr. Wesley continued to make alterations and additions to the economy of the Methodists as "common sense and scripture directed him."

In Page 5th, where he is speaking of the first institution of the Methodist Society in London, we read as follows. "Thus arose, without any previous design, what was afterwards called a society. But, (page 7th and 8th) it was not long before an objection was made to this, which had not once entered my thought. Is not this making a schism? is not the joining these people together, gathering Churches out of Churches? It was easily answered, if you mean, only gathering people out of buildings called Churches, it is: but if you mean dividing Christians from Christians, and so destroying fellowship, it is not: for 1. These were not Christians before they were thus joined. Most of them were barefaced heathens. 2. Neither are they Christians, from whom you suppose them to be divided. You will not look me in the face and say, they are. What! drunken Christians? cursing and swearing Christians? lying Christians? cheating Christians? If these are Christians at all, they are Devil-Christians, (as the poor Malabarians term them). 3. Neither are they divided any more than they were before, even from those wretched Devil-Christians. They are as ready as ever to assist them, and to perform every office of real kindness towards them. 4. If it be said, but there are some true Christians in the parish, and you destroy the Christian fellowship between these and them. I answer,

that which never existed cannot be destroyed. Which of these true Christians had any such fellowship with these? who watched over them in love? who advised and exhorted them from time to time? who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This and this alone is Christian fellowship. But alas! where is it to be found? Look East, or West, or North, or South, name what parish you please, is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand? What Christian connection is there between them? what intercourse in spiritual things? what bearing of one anothers burdens? What a mere jest it is then, to talk so gravely of destroying what never was."

All who have read one or both of the pamphlets, published lately by a Gentleman, in favor of the Bristol Trustees; and against a separation of the Methodists from the Established Church, under the title of "Considerations," &c. would do well, before they swallow his gilded bait, to compare his arguments for the Church of England, with what Mr. Wesley has said respecting it, in the passage above quoted, and then candidly enquire, does not the same description agree with the Church of England now? and if so, who is the greatest friend to Methodism, he who will have no religious connection with bare faced heathens, or Devil-Christians, but come out from among them, and unite with those who are determined, that none of the unfruitful workers of darkness shall be encouraged among them; or those who allow all kinds of sinners, who call themselves Christians, to engage in that most sacred tie of church fellowship, the Lord's Supper, with his holy and obedient people, merely because the time may come when even the Lord's Supper may cause relents in them? It certainly never was intended to *beget* repentance. It may indeed be an *incouragement* to real penitents; but if they are such, their works will prove it, and I must give up my Bible, and the testimony of the first ages of Christianity, before I can allow, that any Church of Christ ever permitted habitual sinners to communicate with the faithful.

But to return. In the following part of the pamphlet

referred to, you may read an account of Mr. Wesley's alterations, and improvements in the Methodist Societies. Following the *old Plan* "common sense and scripture," he divided the Society into Classes and Bands, appointed Class-leaders, and the method of collecting the class money (as it is now called) weekly. But Mr. Wesley soon found, that some persons who would find fault with every thing, and others who were frightened at every thing, as an innovation of the *old Plan*, objected, "there were no such meetings when I came into the Society first, and why should there now? I do not understand these things, and this changing one thing after another continually." It was easily answered. "It was pity but they had been at first. But we knew not then either the *need* or *benefit* of them. That with regard to these little prudential helps, with respect to which, we are continually changing one thing after another, it is not a weakness or fault, (as you may imagine) but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means we declare them to be merely prudential: not essential, not of divine institution. We are always open to instruction, willing to be wiser every day, than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better."

Upon the above; I may remark with confidence, there is no other change attempted in the present time, than such as Mr. Wesley refers to; and which he allowed we should be continually making, circumstances continually occurring that would require it: and thus become wiser to-day than we were yesterday. To mention only one instance, Mr. Wesley when alive was our head. To him we appealed, and to his decision we submitted, respecting every thing in which we required his interference in the interim of the Conferences. But where is there a Preacher capable of the charge, and to whom Preachers and people would submit? We know of none. We cannot single out any one Preacher in a District, (so called) that so far exceeds all the rest of his Brethren in that District, as that his decision would be as much submitted to, as that of the whole. And we know, there must be some substitute for Mr. Wesley in this way. Now what way more

equitable than that the whole of the Preachers in any particular District, should decide upon any disagreeable matter in that District? Surely this must be more free from partiality, than that of the decision of any one of that number: besides there is still an appeal to the Conference.

In the thirteenth Page of the same Tract another kind of objection is urged, to which we have a very satisfactory answer, "These it is said, are all man's inventions." And what then? That is, they are methods which men have found, by reason and common sense, for the more effectually applying several scripture rules, couched in general terms, to particular occasions." In the eighteenth and nineteenth Pages we have an account of the objections made to the Bands. "These were not at first, there is no scripture for them, these are man's works, man's building, &c." Yea it was farther objected, "these Bands are mere Popery." Mr. Wesley's answer to the last charge is a sufficient confutation of the many objections that are frequently made at this time, to our Class and Band-meetings; it would be well therefore for the Methodists who meet with such objections, to answer them, in Mr. Wesley's language, as follows. "Those who affirm this, know not that they betray in themselves, the most gross and shameful ignorance. Do not they know, that the only Popish confession is the confession made by a single person to a Priest? Whereas what we practise, is the confession of several persons conjointly, not to a Priest, but to each other. Consequently it has no analogy at all to a Popish confession. But the truth is, this is a stale objection which many people make against any thing they do not like, it is all Popery out of hand."

I shall now, as proposed, give you some extracts from Mr. Wesley's sentiments concerning the Christian Church, and the Church of England, which you may find in his most excellent Sermon on the Church, published in the 6th volume of his Sermons. "The catholic, or universal Church, is, all the persons in the universe, whom God hath so called out of the world, as to entitle them to the preceding character, as to be *one body, united by one spirit. Having one Faith, one Hope, one Baptism, one God and Father*

of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all. That part of this great body, the universal Church, which inhabit any one Kingdom or Nation, we may properly term a *National Church*, as the Church of France, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland. A smaller part of the universal Church, are the Christians that inhabit one City, or Town; as the Church of Ephesus. Two or three Christian believers united together, are a Church in the narrowest sense of the word." I shall not forestall your judgment upon this description, as applicable to the present disputes about the true Church of Christ; but proceed to give you Mr. Wesley's quotation; (in Page 181 of the same Sermon) from the nineteenth article of the Church of England, proving that our reformers, were of the same mind with himself, respecting a Christian Church.

"The visible Church of Christ, is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered." Before I proceed to give the whole of what I intend, from Mr. Wesley's Sermon, which I have referred to, I think it needful to make a few remarks upon the above definition, of the Church of England, in her own articles. The Methodists do not desire to separate from such a Church, wherever they find it; but wish in the fullest sense of the word to be a part of that Church of England constituted of faithful men; having the pure word of God preached to them, and the Sacraments duly administered. But where can they find such a Church? Is there such a one established in this kingdom? There are a few instances, where the pure word of God (or the Doctrines of the Church of England) is preached, and but very few, when we take the nation collectively. There are more instances where the Sacraments (so called) are frequently administered; but not one can there be found, where none but faithful people (or even outwardly moral characters) are permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. All those who appear on those occasions are permitted to communicate with the faithful, and supposing a Minister to be resolute enough to withstand a rich wicked neighbour, especially one who wants to qualify himself, by this

sacred ordinance, for a lucrative office, what is he likely to expect? I need not say. There have been proofs sufficient that such an opposition would be no better than beating the air. And therefore, though the Methodists are charged by a Church Champion, with having "cast off their first faith," we deny the charge in every sense in which it can be applied, and retort the same upon himself. The Church of England for which he contends has "cast off her first faith," in all its essential parts.

I shall now call your attention to another part of the Sermon referred to upon this head, Page 182. "These things being considered, says Mr. Wesley, it is easy to answer that question, what is the Church of England?" (I beg you seriously to attend to this answer of Mr. Wesley, on this head, as it is of great importance to the subject in hand.) "The Church of England is that body of men in England, in whom there is *one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, which have one Baptism, one God and Father of all*. This, and this alone, is the Church of England, according to the Doctrine of the Apostles." Seeing then we have two such evidences as the Church of England herself, and Mr. Wesley, in favor of the necessity of true faith and spiritual union, in order to a Christian Church, or the Church of Christ in England; we will not be dragooned into a religious union with men who are a scandal to the Christian name. But by keeping separate from them in Church fellowship, we will testify to the world that we give them no countenance. But where we meet with a Christian Church according to the 19th article of the Church of England, with them we will rejoice to unite.

I shall, in the third place, as proposed, quote some of Mr. Wesley's declarations which favour a separation from the Church of England, and which is by some called a departure from the old Plan. Now the ordination of Ministers to perform the whole of the ministerial function, viz. preach and administer the Sacraments, must be considered the most material link in this chain, as all the rest follow of course. It is certain Mr. Wesley did ordain for this purpose, not one, but many;

not for one place only, as America, but Scotland, the West-Indies, and for England itself. This has been over and over again represented and proved in the present controversy, and no one has been hardy enough to deny it. And that he did this at several different times, is equally certain; leaving sometimes years between. So that to charge it upon those who had the influence over him, by persuasion, for the moment, is absurd, and contradicted by facts. If he returned by cool reason, to what is called his former sentiments, that is to condemn, at least secretly, what he had done, why did he repeat the same at different periods, over and over again, and give the same subject increasing latitude? No doubt from the maturest deliberation; and which we cannot allow to be the effect of an impaired understanding. His last sermons are a striking proof to the contrary. But those who read over candidly what has been already said, respecting the "old Plan," the Christian Church, and the Church of England, will see, that Mr. Wesley did not separate, or encourage others to separate from *that* Church of England; but that its greatest votaries are, in general, the greatest separatists, in the most essential points, viz. her Doctrines and Discipline. And where these are not regarded, there can be no true Church.

To prove what I have said respecting Mr. Wesley's conduct on the subject of ordination, as being not an hasty, but well weighed step, I shall give you his own words on that subject, which I take from the minute of the Conference for the year 1786, page 20th. This part refers to the ordination for America. "Judging, says he, this to be a case of real necessity, I took a step, which for peace and quietness I had refrained from taking for many years: I exercised that power which I am fully persuaded the great Shepherd and Bishop of the Church has given me. I appointed three of our labourers to go and help them, (the Americans) by, not only preaching the word of God, but likewise administering the Lord's Supper, and baptizing their children." Mr. Wesley declares in the above, that what he did in ordaining the Preachers, was the effect of a full conviction of its legality, and long deliberation, not a sudden act, without premeditation. And in the

next page of the same minutes, you may read nearly the same account respecting Scotland; and in this Mr. Wesley followed "common sense and scripture." In the same minutes already referred to, he gives directions upon the subject of preaching in what is called Church-hours in England.

First. "When the Minister, or Clergyman is a notoriously wicked man." The word notorious, being somewhat ambiguous to some of the Methodists, it may be useful to remark here, that when a man lives in any open sin, he is in this sense, a notoriously wicked man.—That is, he is noted or known to be wicked. I will not say, there are many such in the Church of England, and that in many places, the people must not go to Church at all, if they are not to hear such; but I will describe some of the prevailing sins of the present day, allowed to be so by all who are truly religious; and then leave you to judge for yourselves respecting persons and places. Drunkenness, Swearing, Card-playing, attending Balls, Theatrical Amusements, and all public diversions. We universally allow, that if any person live in the practice of any of these, he is no Minister of Jesus Christ, but of the synagogue of Satan, for his works he does.

The second condition is, "When the Minister preaches Arianism, or equally pernicious Doctrines." We allow, that a denial of inspiration, justification by faith, and heart holiness, is as pernicious to Christianity, as any doctrine that can be preached; for it strikes at its very root, and overturns the whole system. And need I say, there are few churches where this is not the case? In the Magazine for 1789, page 45, Mr. Wesley speaks more plain on this head. It is as follows. "A kind of separation has already taken place, and will inevitably spread, though by slow degrees. Those ministers (so called) who neither live nor preach the gospel, I dare not say, are sent of God. Where one of these is settled, many of the Methodists dare not attend his ministry. So, if there be no other Church in that neighbourhood, they go to Church no more. This is the case in a few places already, and it will be the case in more. And no one can justly blame

me for this ; neither is it contrary to any of my professions." From the last quotation every candid, judicious Methodist will conclude, Mr. Wesley did not expect in his life time, that the Methodists would attend the ministry of such as are here described ; but rather that they would go to church no more ; and therefore allowed them service in their own chapels, in church-hours. But if such go to church no more, are they to neglect an express command of Christ ? I may add, one of the most precious privileges of the gospel, " the Lord's Supper " ? I shall not here argue against those who say, it is no command of Christ, but shall refer them to Mr. Wesley's sermon on that subject, where they will see it insisted on as such, in the strongest terms. If they are not to neglect it, who is to assist them in it ? They have no other helps in their own chapels but their own Preachers ; and it is clear, by Mr. Wesley's ordaining so many Preachers for Scotland, whom he knew, would in a few years return to England ; and by his ordaining some for England only, that he fully intended this should be done.

I intended when I began, to have enlarged more upon the latter part of my subject, but it has been done by a more able hand, in a Pamphlet addressed to the Methodist Society at Leeds, which fell in my way since I began this. I shall therefore conclude these remarks with an earnest request to my Reader to pardon my freedom in the cause of Truth. I desire no other gain by this publication than the satisfaction of promoting peace among my Brethren. And if this end be not answered, I shall still have the consolation to think that I have made an attempt towards it.

F I N I S.